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ABSTRACT

From the perspective of counseling the distance learner, this paper explores trends in literature which might reflect increased awareness of the needs of the non-traditional student and the establishment and mobilization of resources to meet those needs. It is noted that comparatively little has been written in this specialized field so that a major purpose is to provide focus for further work. The need for counseling for non-traditional students is documented in the context of worldwide expansion of non-traditional programs. Educational brokering--independent learning consultants functioning as intermediaries between diverse groups of students and the vast array of learning resources in their community--is highlighted as an encouraging component of any open education system. It is postulated that the need for counseling and information among non-traditional learners is greatest at the beginning of their study and that higher withdrawal rates among external students as compared to internal ones may be largely due to need for counseling. Four types of communication technology for distance counseling are examined: correspondence counseling, audio-cassette counseling, telephone counseling (five methods), and face-to-face counseling (three ways). Issues are also raised with regard to counseling the academic staff who work with distance students. Conclusions point up need for investigation of needs of non-traditional students, independent counseling services, training of specialist counselors, and the range of activities. The bibliography of over 150 items includes journal articles, conference papers, and reports largely of U.S., British, and Australian origin. (JT)

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COUNSELLING THE DISTANCE LEARNER

A SURVEY OF TRENDS AND LITERATURE

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'The value of adult education is not to be measured solely by direct increases in earning power or productive capacity or by any other material yardstick, but by the quality of life it inspires in the individual and generates for the community at large.'

Russell Report.

'.....courses should have a high priority in taking account of the growing desire in the field of adult education to respond to the needs of the learners, as expressed by themselves, rather than make a provision of prescriptive courses which leave no room for individual development or exploration' -- personal growth through counselling is, in essence, what continuing education is all about.

Murgatroyd, quoting Venables.

'With rising educational aspiration and sophistication, correspondence study should continue to be an important route for those seeking personal development.'

Burton R. Clark.

'As we anticipate the role of correspondence and other forms of distance teaching and learning in the next century, we should expect all who need dependency to find room in the classrooms, while the rest -- especially the majority of the adults -- should find distance a natural and welcome environment for learning.'

Michael G. Moore. (1)

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COUNSELLING THE DISTANCE LEARNER

INTRODUCTION

As exploration began around this topic, without doubt, the most significant articles which conditioned our thinking were those by Michael Moore, as he developed his concept of independent learning and John Davison's 'Educational Counselling in Academic Studies'.

On the one hand Moore embraces generally all students described as distance learners, external students, off-campus students, non-traditional students, along with on-campus independent learners, as he attempts to conceptualize the notion of independent learning. On the other hand Davison expressed the awareness that counselling is still seen as peripheral to the essential 'educational' activity and argues for its integration into the educational process.

The real position underlying all this paper is: if Moore's postulations are correct, then Davison's integration will be achieved - by having the educational enterprise become eccentric. Traditional education will be integrated into counselling, if Moore's thesis becomes substantiated.

From the narrow perspective then of counselling the distance learner, this paper explores trends in literature which might reflect increased awareness of the needs of the non-traditional student and the establishment and mobilization of resources to meet those needs.

The very notion of counselling is itself formally barely sixty years old, having sprung from the vocational counselling roots of Parsons. In that time it has passed through the hands of Rogerian, Skinnerian and Neo-Freudian thinkers, to mention but a few. It has widened far beyond the notion of vocational counselling. It embraces activities such as information-giving, advice-giving, counselling, psychotherapy. Each one of these can be further departmentalised, e.g., psychotheraphy can be seen as Rogerian client-centred, Gestalt, behavioral, reality, psycho-analytic, Existential etc. Counselling can be formal and informal. It can be focussed on personal development, almost in vacuo, or seen in a developmental social milieu. As it involves counsellors, social workers, and psychologists etc. it evokes from Arbuckle (1) the cry · 'Let's "ecumenicalize" '.

Note : External Studies is the Australian term for the more usual international term, distance education.

From this rapidly changing kaleidoscope we attempted to extract those writings which have something to say about counselling in an educational context - striving meantime to avoid involvement in the vast school-counselling literature and moving perceptively through the College counselling literature. As we felt we 'struck gold' so infrequently in the narrow field of counselling services to distance learners, we were forced back to include the more general literature on counselling the adult learner, the non-traditional student, the part-time student. While all of this literature has potentially much to offer those specializing with distance learners, it nevertheless serves to illustrate that there is comparatively little written in this specialized field. It is hoped our paper will provide some focus for further work.

A comment from the time perspective is also worth offering. Prior to 1960, little of any significance to the study had been written. In the 1960s much development took place in the counselling field in general, as counselling emerged as a profession. Nevertheless it is really only in the 1970s that much material in the general field of counselling adult learners begins to emerge. Three major stimuli to this were the exodus of adolescents from the campuses of U.S.A., the development of the British Open University and a savage growth in unemployment in Western societies - all in the context of major governmental shifts in the allocation of educational funding.

We have found little writing that explores the dimensions of the counselling needs of the student over his academic life; nor little that explores the range of personnel involved in the counselling process, as outlined briefly in an earlier paper. (see Mitchell (3)) In clarification of what styles of counselling services are needed and by whom are they best provided, further documentation is needed.

Again, while we have extracted some articles on the battery of desirable counsellor qualities, we have not focussed much on the training of counsellors; and, as Shoben reminds us : 'counselling is an interactive affair, not a set of unrelated actions of one person who is informed on behalf of another who is not'.

COUNSELLING : THE RECOGNITION OF THE FUNCTION

Academic and vocational guidance and counselling has, of course, long been regarded as an important, indeed indispensable, component of traditional institutionalized graduate/undergraduate programmes. As Maslow records the Chatham Conference (1965) : "Counselling is a systematic exploration of self

and/or environment by a client with the aid of a counsellor to clarify self-understanding and/or environmental alternatives so that behavior modification or decisions are made on the basis of greater cognitive and affective understanding." Caffarella says simply 'counselling is defined as a process whereby one comes to terms with his world'. The primacy of the guidance and counselling function within on-campus education programmes is undergirded by a conspicuous abundance of published material concerned with the general theory and practice of individual and group counselling procedures; and institutions accept a clear responsibility to integrate students into the *cloistered portals* of the academic world.

Outside the traditional mode of higher education, by contrast, the prevailing situation with regard to the provision of guidance, counselling and advisory services is open to the charge of culpable neglect and inertia. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the context of external studies programmes where, with few notable exceptions, the counselling and information function has been an impoverished, depressed and often non-existent element in a system of education which, in Australia at least, has remained one of the most underdeveloped and undernourished areas of educational endeavour. Fortunately, there is promise of change. A variety of changes are being implemented and these will be cited later.

That distance learning has for so long remained in this unfortunate state is mainly attributable to the cumulative effect of three distinct yet related factors. In the first place, there has been until the last few years, an almost complete disregard among top-level educational administrators of the need for counselling and other advisory services in non-traditional learning programmes generally. As Ironside and Jacobs (and Grabowski in a lesser way) have pointed out in their annotated bibliographical study of adult independent learners in North America, many influential research reports and papers dealing with various aspects of open education schemes, as well as many leading textbooks on the subject, fail to make any mention whatsoever of the responsibility to ensure adequate provision for the counselling and information needs of adult students. This customary lack of recognition has meant that, at the conceptual level, "counselling at a distance" has tended to be viewed neither as a necessary nor natural corollary of "teaching at a distance". ('It could be argued that "counselling at a distance" is a natural and necessary development for an institution which teaches at a distance'. Watkins of the O.U.) At the operational level, it is uncommon to find any formal commitment to counselling as an educational activity which is offered as an integral part of the external education process.

Secondly, there seems to exist in the minds of many educational policy-

makers a lamentable lack of serious commitment to upgrading the quality of external studies programmes; particularly where this involves a concomitant curtailment or attenuation of conventional educational facilities. This is especially true in relation to the provision of external learner support services, which have seldom received tangible endorsement from educational funding authorities. The consequent poor allocation of resources has meant, as Holmes has indicated in a recent survey of current Australian thinking and trends in the external studies area, that despite a somewhat belated concern for counselling in some programmes, "it is rare that anything but limited student information, along with inadequate academic, vocational and personal counselling is available to students".

Thirdly, there has been (and still is) a curious reluctance to make any sort of clear-cut role distinctions within external education programmes. For the most part this reflects an unwillingness to view the provision of guidance and advisory counselling services for external learners as an important matter in its own right. On the contrary, the significance of such services has been widely under-rated by the architects of most off-campus studies schemes, and, where not totally ignored, they have been awkwardly grafted onto and often subsumed within the existing institutional framework. Thus, one finds that even in those instances (e.g. South Australian Colleges of Advanced Education) where a purposeful attempt has been made to incorporate counselling and information services within an external studies system, they have invariably been treated as a secondary and somewhat expendable responsibility, frequently entrusted to already heavily burdened teaching or administrative personnel, who lack the requisite expertise or competence to satisfactorily fulful their role. As Warman would put it (a somewhat dated study), the result has been that the limitations on effective counselling of external students have been greatly increased, while the discrepancy between desired and actual goals of such activity has been incalculably widened. It creates the situation Shoben so aptly describes where 'clients are not easily liked or appreciated'. There are, however, some encouraging indications which suggest that this state of affairs is improving. Examples would be Heffernan et al, Hutchinson, and Davis and Delaney, each of whom has been involved in the development of the concept, 'Educational Brokering'. The following resumé is associated with the work of Heffernan et al and serves as illustrative of one branch of innovation.

EDUCATIONAL BROKERING

Recently, a number of interesting unorthodox developments have recognised that the counselling and information function is a vital and integral component of any open education system. Among the most ambitious of these projects has

been the Learning Consultant Network established by the Regional Learning Service of Central New York in 1973 under the auspices of Syracuse University. The scheme provides an independent educational counselling service to assist adult learners into and through study programmes offered by academic and other learning institutions. In the words of Vickers, the scheme attempts to create a "supportive association" for non-traditional learners who, without the benefit of substantial peer support and encouragement, might find their educational goals unattainable. In essence, learning counsultants function as educational brokers or intermediaries between a diverse group of students and the vast array of learning resources in their community.

As Beamish points out, the counsultant serves the student as a "confidential counsellor, professional advisor, well-informed resource and loyal advocate and supporter". The consultant operates to increase the student's sense of self-reliance and to promote his capability of assuming major responsibility for his own educational welfare.

Educational brokering has developed so successfully, via such groups as the Regional Learning Service, that it now reports through the National Center for Education Brokering. Heffernan et al is primary reading, while Vickers, Kordalewski and Alamprese-Johnson, Beamish, and Thompson and Jensen, all contribute to the general theme; as of course, does the important N.C.E.B. Bulletin. Eagleston describes Northern Ireland experience (since re-deployed) though), Mitchell (2) raises conceptual problems relevant to Australia, while Davis and Engledon (nee Delaney) provide descriptions of an Australian model.

Brokering illustrates that an independent counselling service is 'student-oriented' not 'recruitment-oriented' (Watkins).

THE NEED FOR COUNSELLING FOR NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

Along with the expansion of non-traditional programmes throughout the world, there has been a mounting consciousness among some educators and administrators of the need to supply more adequate learner support systems, including comprehensive guidance and counselling facilities. So far, these developments, as Ironside has shown, have been most pronounced in the United States where there has been a growing concern for the "particular counselling and information needs of various groups in the society and the development of special programmes to meet these needs". Thus the National Commission on Non-Traditional Study in its final report of 1973 unequivocably recommended the development of "a network of guidance and information centres where potential students can learn about the variety of programmes and opportunities available to them." The major objective of these new agencies, the report went on,

would be "to provide and disseminate information and provide counselling services" for the participants in non-traditional programmes. Similarly, in the British Isles, the definitive Venables Report on Continuing Education expressly acknowledged that, because of the wide variety of opportunities within a major national open education programme, emphasis must be placed on the need for an "adequate and easily accessible" educational advisory service capable of enabling students to understand the possibilities available to them and the provisions most suited to their needs. In Australia, too, as Northcott states, a number of recent reports on post-secondary education have stressed the need to provide accurate up-to-date information and advice for external students on matters related to educational and career opportunities. Foremost among these has been the report of the Committee on Open Tertiary Education (Karmel) which suggested that one of the primary functions of the proposed National Institute of Open Tertiary Education should be "to provide or encourage the provision of information and counselling services.....".

To date, most of the literature which has been generated by these undercurrents has focused on the establishment of career counselling and personal services for adult learners. Abstracts from the plethora of studies and reports dealing with these issues are to be found in the bibliographies compiled by Ironside and Glick. Among the most useful and relevant of these monographs are the results of an empirical research project carried out by Thompson on adult students enrolled in an assortment of continuing education programmes in the United States, which makes the point that, whatever else it may entail, the ultimate goal of counselling should be "to help the adult discover his potential, respond more effectively to new experiences, and work out a meaningful, viable lifestyle". (cf. Blocher (2) and Shoben) Of no less significance are the two substantial reference works by Farmer which attempt to schematize some of the major conceptual issues associated with counselling adult learners in higher education generally, while Gilli, Fisher, Giffard, Nejedlo, Bagley et al, Barbier have all looked at various types of educational counselling practices and some of the most common counselling problems encountered with adults. According to Thoroman there is a vital need to develop specialized programmes of vocational counselling for adults which place major emphasis on the individual dynamic self-concept of the student with the counsellor being sufficiently versatil , well-informed and flexible to assist students in defining and attaining their goals. Similarly, Jesse and Long have stressed the need to clarify and individualize to a greater extent the relationship between counsellor and learner in non-traditional adult programmes.

Complementing these major works are a number of comparatively short journal articles and papers which discuss some of the basic principles and

techniques involved in conducting successful counselling programmes for adult learners. Meyer, P., McElaney, the Cantonis, and Vontress and Thomas are among the earliest writers to concern themselves with the application of educational counselling procedures to adults as a distinct group. Mitchell,R. has attempted to construct a functional model for adult basic education in which counselling is one of a range of co-ordinated guidance services. Qazilbash, too, maintains that the success of guidance and counselling programmes depends on the establishment of a framework within which guidance and counselling can operate in harmony with the total adult basic education programme. Several other writers, including Griswold, Erickson and Grabowski, have argued that there is a need for the development of a philosophy of adult counselling which recognises that the interests and anxieties of adult learners are somewhat different from those of their adolescent counterparts. Grabowski's study is particularly important. That it is necessary to understand the needs of adults has been pursued also by Perrone, Porter, Schlossberg, Batdorf, and Boyd and Griffith.

Other similar studies have been undertaken by Williams, G., who surveyed a group of continuing education students to determine the types and extent of counselling services they required, and Caffarella, who presents a working model of how the counselling process can be related and integrated into non-traditional education programmes. Finally, Krings has drawn attention to some of the principal educational problems faced by adult students and has suggested that a major obstacle in implementing a viable problem-solving counselling service is lack of awareness among students of its existence and/or inability to gain access to it.

Although all of these studies concentrate exclusively on the provision of guidance and counselling programmes in response to the needs of adults, they nevertheless have direct relevance to any discussion of the extension of these services to non-traditional or external learners generally, since, as Kimmel has pointed out, the vast majority of adult students, either because of family commitments or employment responsibilities, tend to participate in the non-traditional mode of continuing education.

In a recent survey completed under the auspices of the National Institute of Education in Washington DC, Bowen, Edelstein and Medsker have attempted to identify and analyse the information needs of decision makers enrolled in non-traditional education programmes. Their findings, which have been substantially confirmed in a comparative study by Cross and Zusman, show that, because most non-traditional learners who study independently from a learning institution are deprived of the support and reinforcing attributes of the student peer group, they tend to exhibit specialized needs and have individualized problems which are often quite distinct from those of the traditional learner.

Where these two groups of learners share common problems and anxieties related to academic performance or vocational uncertainties, those of the off-campus student appear to be nearly always more acute and intense than those of the internal learner. This psychosis portrays the external learner as frequently suffering from a sense of intellectual alienation which sometimes manifests itself as a feeling of academic inferiority or doubts about capacity to learn. Prominent among the educational difficulties (quite apart from familial, financial, social etc. difficulties) encountered by non-traditional learners are lack of confidence, inadequate study skills, inability to articulate educational goals or to make appropriate choices from a wide range of educational offerings, unrealistic or impractical expectations, and frustration over the apparent irrelevance of courses to vocational aspirations and interests. For those learners who have previously experienced failure in formal education environments, such problems are invariably exacerbated. These same tendencies have been noted by Smith (1). "Externals", he writes, "are almost notorious for underrating themselves in academic terms and often feel inadequate for the task ahead, especially if they have had not previous tertiary education experience." Their results confound their earlier self-ratings.

Studies of this nature underline the necessity for making available some sort of student counselling service in external education programmes. Holmberg implies that it is both morally and educationally unethical to deny an effective information-giving and counselling service to students who, because of their individual circumstances, are forced to study at a distance: "Most students and would-be students need information about the paths of study that interest them, where they lead and what they are like. In many cases they also wish to have access to personal advice both before their study decision and during their studies". He goes on to say that, as distance students are usually alone in their study with the anxiety and problems they encounter, it is incumbent upon distance education programmes to help them find solutions to their problems. The delicate counselling problem for the counsellor is to know how involved he should become in all the other decisions which the adult learner has to make affecting the totality of his life (the reality of his situation).

These views have been solidy endorsed by Comfort who sees counselling as a critical activity which minimizes the adverse effects of learning situations, helps new students adjust to their learning environment, provides a climate which encourages students to seek help, and develops in them sufficient insight, so that they may solve their own problems. Failure to provide proper guidance and counselling facilities, he warns, will inevitably result in "haphazard course selection, over-estimation of ability, discontinuity in knowledge accumulation and unfamiliarity with requirements, which may cause high anxiety and increase

the probability of discontinuing or dropping out from a course of study."

It is worth noting that practically all statistical analyses of student attrition and retention rates in university and college extension programmes lend support to the claim that a well-organized guidance and counselling function should be accorded a high priority in the development of off-campus patterns of education. James and Wedemeyer, Childs, Spencer and Harter have all examined the factors primarily associated with the non-completion of courses of study at educational institutions offering correspondence programmes in the United States. These studies indicate that external students tend to have low levels of self-expectation with regard to continuing education, that they are often less committed to their course of study than full-time on-campus students, and that, because of their geographical isolation and limited opportunities for face-to-face contact, many external students feel insufficiently assimilated into the fabric of the learning institution, which in turn has an adverse effect on their academic motivation and performance.

These studies nevertheless suggest that other points should be considered. For example, are the commitment expectations of educational institutions justified, given the range of competing loyalties an adult student has to reconcile? Do the educational offerings of institutions even justify commitment, e.g. how often is the statement: 'The course wasn't what I expected or needed' also a reflection on the institution's capacity to state clearly the aims and goals of a course? Should an adult learner be expected to maintain a consistently high level of commitment over a six year part-time programme (vis-a-vis the adolescent's two year full-time commitment)?

On the question of insufficient assimilation is this merely a hang-over of the expectation that students should be integrated into the fabric of the academy (what Sennett delightfully describes as the'celebration of the ghetto')? If we take Michael Moore and Harper seriously, our task may be to help the student rejoice that he is not trapped in the ghetto. This change of attitude may also elevate the levels of self-expectations of students as well. Part of the solution of this 'problem' may be the development of counselling services to teachers of adult learners, to which reference will be made later in a discussion on Davison's position.

Further, the student's feelings of deprivation because of limited opportunities of face-to-face contact may arise from purely psychological needs and may contain nothing peculiar to the educational exchange. For example, do not the same feelings of deprivation arise when one deals with an invisible and distant lawyer, bank manager, public servant or doctor?

The reference to psychological needs is a reminder that Wedemeyer stresses that distance learning may describe the psychologically distant as well as the physically remote.

INITIAL COUNSELLING

It is postulated that the demand for counselling and information among non-traditional learners is greatest at the (re-) commencement of a course of study. Tom Brady at Wisconsin in 1975 was preparing a doctoral thesis in this general area. This period of initial involvement and induction into courses is quite often fraught with anxiety and doubts on the part of new students. For example, it requires a measure of effrontery for a 'failure of many years ago' to have the audacity to physically enter the doors of an 'ivory tower' to seek formal admission to a course.

The question has also been raised of the need for research into the range of counselling functions within the initial interview(s), covering therapy, information-giving etc. (Mitchell (3).)

Liu has identified four main groups of problems which student welfare and advisory agencies are on the whole concerned with. These include problems associated with (i) vocational goals and educational aspirations, (ii) administrative and procedural complexities and ambiguities, (iii) academic motivation or progress, and (iv) emotional adjustment and personal development. Doughty also offers comment in this area.

COUNSELLING SERVICES AND HIGH WITHDRAWAL RATES

Another significant finding has been that withdrawal rates among externals exceeded those of internal students. On this point, Calder, McIntosh and Morrison have observed that student withdrawal from courses at the Open University was particularly heavy in the early stages of the course and that many students who enrolled for a course never actually commenced it. Similar trends have been identified by Meddleton, Mitchell(4)(5), Smith, P. and Malley in external study programmes conducted by universities and colleges within Australia. Meddleton, in a 1964 study, has shown that the proportion of external students who withdraw before completing university programmes is between 30 and 40 per cent. He also produces evidence which demonstrates that the incidence of withdrawal is highest in the first year of external study. Indeed, the Martin Report on the Future Tertiary Education in Australia (also 1964) concluded that withdrawal and non-completion in external study schemes was so heavy that they should be phased out of existence.

Since then, matters have improved somewhat, although Rekkedal (2) reminds us, retention of students within external study courses is still discouragingly much lower than for comparable non-external courses.

The important points to note here though are : firstly, all of these studies are based on single institutions known to us and we feel that peculiar factors may offer explanation in each case; second the adult external student has many demands on his resources and the distant demands of a study programme are often the easiest to disengage; third, the withdrawal rates of on-campus students have taken a dramatic surge upwards in recent years; fourth, the experience of Rekkedal is in courses not comparable to those of other studies and is generated from Norway. As with Rekkedal's experience, positive steps to minimize withdrawals is bearing significant response (see Rekkedal (1).) : the very conduct of the studies was evidence of recognition of the problem and the desire to do something about it.

Peterson, Rekkedal (1), Bååth, Mitchell(4) (5) and Ligori have stressed that personal contact and individualization in correspondence education can pay valuable dividends in terms of reducing student withdrawal. Much more definitive research is needed to determine the precise nature of the correlation between the availability of counselling and the retention of students in continuing education programmes generally. Suffice to say that it is significant to contrast the paucity of counselling which "high risk" external students receive as compared with "low risk" internal students.

COUNSELLING : AND THE TECHNOLOGY OF COMMUNICATION

In seeking to establish a meaningful counselling relationship with distance students, it is first necessary to find a suitable means of communication. The means employed will be determined by such variables as the location of students and density of numbers, the distribution and accessibility of counselling points, the number of counsellors and range of counselling skills available, and the level of educational technology which the university or college invokes to support its off-campus counselling programme. We note that no detailed study has been made of the correlation of the range of counselling levels and types of media used. Suffice to say, by way of elaboration, that we know of no counsellor who attempts intense therapeutic counselling by letter. Letters contain information and sometimes advice. Telephones allow for more intense and intimate interaction. Therapy almost certainly demands face-to-face encounter.

A. Correspondence Counselling

Usually, external student counselling is undertaken by all forms of correspondence, video-tape, telephone, radio, satellite, exchange of audiotape cassettes and, where possible, direct face-to-face contact. Most frequently a combination of media is used; such combination often reflecting directly the complexity of the counselling problem. Lewis and Tomlinson have shown that a quite "meaningful relationship" can be established and sustained through exchanges of written material. By itself, however, correspondence counselling can impose serious limitations on the quality of communication and interation. (see Debnam) As Mackenzie says, there is some scope for expanding and improving the impact of printed material, but the decidedly impersonal nature of this form of contact can certainly militate against effective counselling.

Moreover, counselling by correspondence is a strictly "one-way" process, necessarily entailing a significant time delay which means that a student seeking information or guidance has no opportunity of receiving it at once, when circumstances are most relevant.

Research by Blackwood and Trent in the United States and Lewis in the United Kingdom shows that the overwhelming majority of external learners derive greater satisfaction from personal conversations and face-to-face counselling. (The satisfaction may have little to do with the essential business of 'education' but may be largely psychological. For example, from the briefest contact with a voice, a photo or a face, a student can say 'I know my lecturer'.) This is especially so where individual problems require long periods of intensive counselling and psychotherapy. Yet despite its desirability, in many systems of distance education there are some "disadvantaged" students who have no opportunity to receive face-to-face counselling, even where institutional provision exists for it.

Davison contends that "the expansion of educational technology more than any other factor has brought the counselling issue to the forefront of educational practice". Innovations in audiotape and telecommunications have been integrated into external delivery systems, making it possible for more personalized counselling to be accessible to all students, irrespective of their proximity to programmes and staff resources.

B. Audio-cassette Counselling

The use of audiotape cassette replay systems show them to be an acceptable and inexpensive medium for conveying information and advice to students.

Investigations by Logan, Fuller and Denehy for example, reveal that students at the University of Iowa preferred cassette feedback, because :

(i) it seemed to be more personalised than written comments,
(ii) they regarded the information as being more informative and complete than that obtained via correspondence,
and (iii) their level of academic achievement significantly improved as a result of the use of the audiotape system.

Marshall and Gallagher have also commented favourably on the use of conversation tapes. A project recently sponsored by the South Australian Board of Advanced Education confirms the ability of conversation tapes to establish personal liaison between tutors and their distant students. The report shows that use of tapes greatly assists in curriculum and procedural development, helping students with course-related problems, and the advancement of a "corporate identity" among students. It is still basically a one-way process however and, as such, is still subject to the same time delays and subdued sense of immediacy that afflicts the written mode of communicating. Nevertheless students are more aware of the 'caring concern' of their lecturers.

C. Telephone Counselling

A more efficacious means of external studies counselling involves the use of telephone systems. Ghatala and Wedemeyer see the telephone as "one of the most effective tools for distance teaching and learning.....capable of individualizing, humanizing, personalizing and optimizing instruction.....". Similarly, it is capable of generating highly interactive counselling relationships. Telephone conversations have the advantage over cassette tapes in that they provide spontaneous two-way communication and discussion. The same advantage is argued by the exponents of radio talk-back techniques (see Bystrom in supporting, inter alia, the costs benefits of radio vis-a-vis video). This whole area of use of satellites (with the new possibility of video input as well) is certainly more exciting than the present situation in Australia where some counselling is offered by the awkward radio telephone system - where the counselling exchange is interspersed with the intrusive 'Over' as the 'telephone call' is conducted by the Royal Flying Doctor Service emergency radio link-up in Outback Australia desert.

An additional advantage of telecounselling is its flexibility. Wherever there is a telephone, it is possible to obtain information without travelling, thereby saving time, effort and money. The telephone can potentially put the external student in immediate contact with a counsellor, when and as the need arises. Moreover, Turok (1) believes that the telephone "seems to engender a greater commitment to the task in hand". Telephone users, he observes, are less

prone to time wasting, are more business-like and are generally more eager to come to terms with the matter they are discussing. Turok is arguing from the context of committee meetings by phone, however, and the availability of all committee members has been pre-arranged. It does not deal with the situation of the individual student trying to contact a lecturer.

There are basically five ways in which telephone systems can be employed in distance education programmes.

(i) The student phones the institution whenever he requires information or assistance. This system is completely unstructured and as such suffers from a number of serious drawbacks. Often staff are not available or else time is wasted in bringing them to the phone. Reverse-charge phone calls can avoid student expense but most institutions are reluctant to offer such a service for fear that students will avail themselves of the opportunity too frequently with trivial and unnecessary enquiries. (c.f. I.C.S., Scranton, experience as reported by White.)

(ii) A more acceptable method of one-to-one telephone calls for counselling purposes is the telecard system used by the British Open University in communicating with students living in remote areas of Scotland. The initiative lies with the student who fills in a voucher and posts it to a course tutor or advisor who contacts him by telephone at a pre-arranged time. Although this system of personal calls has, according to Sissons, proved valuable in individual counselling, it nevertheless still contains an element of delay.

(iii) A third method of communicating with students by telephone, sometimes referred to as the "party-line" system, consists of a number of study centres located in different areas, all connected to one another by means of a telephone line. A loudspeaking telephone, which functions like an ordinary telephone with the addition of amplification and voice switching, is installed at each centre enabling small groups of students to communicate with a person or a group located elsewhere. All groups listen to the conversation. Heiliger, Brenden, Ristau and Short all commend the system as an effective and inexpensive means of communicating with students. However, the system is not without limitations. Parker, for instance, found in Wisconsin that initial scepticism of the system by students and staff alike was a major obstacle to ensuring participation, and that lack of face-to-face interaction and visual presentation tended to impersonalize and inhibit communication. Williams, Holloway and Hammond have also drawn

attention to some of the technical problems associated with the use of loudspeaking telephones. It is very important to note that these studies make little reference (a) to the internal counselling support that these groups generate simply because *that* group of students is gathered in *that* room (i.e. peer counselling) and (b) the inhibition that is placed on peer counselling potential because of the intrusion and control by *that* voice on the teleconferencing phone.

(iv) Another method of communicating by telephone in distance education is the "conference call" described by L'Henry-Evans and Turok and successfully tried by the Open University. This system, which is operated by the British Post Office, allows up to eight persons to be connected together at a designated time, each using their own home telephone. As such, it enables students to obtain individual support and guidance in their studies. Used in conjunction with usual correspondence instructional material it represents a most effective and practical method of teaching external students in small groups.

While this operation is essentially a teaching/learning situation, it has valuable counselling potential. For example, the student may have severe physical/psychological trauma in face-to-face learing situation, hence the external enrolment. Someone who is ordinately shy in groups may function comfortably via a 'phone' group. A person with a severely disfigured face is equally at home. A sensitive tutor is alert to the counselling needs expressed by such students; one of whom said recently, 'It's a nice safe way to study.'

A pilot study of the value of telephones was conducted by Ahlm in Sweden, who concluded that correspondence students who were given the opportunity to regularly discuss their study problems by telephone with their teachers performed noticeably better than those who had no such possibility. This pilot study has since been superseded by the major series of studies by Flinck, Bååth and Wångdahl known as the Pedagogical Report Series, Department of Education, University of Lund, covering 1975-1977. Byrd and Eyler have shown that the newly-established telephone-based regional information support service in Virginia was able to provide continuing students with invaluable educational assistance in their off-campus study programmes. See also the experience of the University of Mid-America, Lincoln, Nebraska. An extension of this method, by which telephone conversations

are linked to television broadcasts, is currently being developed in experiments at the British Open University, though at this stage it seems likely that the inordinate costs of the operation will limit its application. Furthermore, in the light of comments offered above, it remains an open question whether or not it will facilitate the counselling exchange.

Other disadvantages of the system often emphasized concern technical imperfections in line quality and limited time availability. Nevertheless, some initial face-to-face contact seems desirable if the inherent impersonality of communicating by telephone is to be eliminated for those who desire it.

(v) A final method of employing the telephone in a counselling capacity for student assistance in distance education is the dial-access information service system outlined in some detail by Flinck. In essence, this system provides a student with a telephone number which he dials to obtain "core information" on different topics by means of pre-recorded tapes. Most of the dial-access systems, operating mainly in the United States, contain an extensive library of tapes. The caller can select the tape he feels most suited to his needs from a catalogue previously distributed to him. Then he calls an operator who inserts the tape in a playback machine.

Although most of the dial access systems presently operating are of the manual type (see Meyer, T.) it is possible to install automated information retrieval versions, wherein each tape in the library has a telephone number. The caller simply phones the dial-access library number and then the selected tape number. A further refinement of this system, alluded to by Ehin, is of course to use a computer to dispense recorded information to callers.

Pearson and Bloch have summarised both the limitations and advantages of the dial-access system. They see the main disadvantage of the system as being the fact that it is limited to audio transmission only. On the other hand, the advantage of the system is that the caller has immediate access to information, and in the case of automatic libraries, it operates 24-hours-a-day. Pearson and Bloch claim that it is also a relatively cheap way to distribute new information to persons who want it, and when they want it. Another problem of course is to keep the system updated. Reuter also praises the system which he says generates considerable enthusiasm among students. It might be added, in conclusion, that such a system is based on the premise that there are substantial numbers of students who exhibit the same or similar information needs for which it is possible to supply rigid stereotyped answers. This system is therefore necessarily restricted

to the most common study problems only and as such it cannot be said to provide a highly interactive or individualized service. It does suit the student who can be content with a modern 'system' answer and leaves the student virtually in complete control of his anonymity and privacy.

D. Face-to-Face Counselling

In any system of distance education there are immense and sometimes insurmountable logistical difficulties involved in establishing and operating a programme which attempts to offer direct face-to-face information, guidance, counselling and referral services, accessible to all individuals, including those in isolated circumstances. Since most institutions at least offer face-to-face counselling services (and, as mentioned,with varying degrees of commitment to the question of availability to all students, on-campus and off-campus), this section will tend to focus on the variety of Australian experience, with a limited selection of overseas sources.

There are basically three ways of providing face-to-face counselling for external students. (i) A professional counselling service can be established and located as a centralized function of the learning institution itself. This structure appears to be most applicable in circumstances where the institution is catering for the needs of both internal and external students, where the number of students enrolled in the off-campus learning programme is comparatively small and concentrated within relatively short distances of the counselling centre, where problems of accessibility are minimal, and where funds available for expenditure on student support services are circumscribed.

The integration of external student counselling with on-campus operations has to date been the prevailing mode of organization in external studies programmes in Australian tertiary institutions. However there are emerging now various modifications to the model.

(a) The University of Queensland, in addition to its regular counselling service, has had its Students' Union appoint an External Students' Counsellor. This counsellor, funded by the students themselves, acts as an on-campus ombudsman for students in relation to the 'Administration' and as a support/guide in relation to the students themselves.

(b) The new Murdoch University in Western Australia clearly developed its counselling role from the on-campus base. An integral centralized three tier system of on-campus counselling exists which is simply made available to external students confronted with educational or vocational decisions. Besides being able

to obtain information and advice from the university's External Studies Unit on questions relating to enrolment and course selection, each student also has access to Murdoch's "Contact Counselling Centre" and may make use of the special Learning Skills Programme. In addition to this, a student with a specific study problem is encouraged to contact his tutor for guidance.

The primary shortcoming of a system such as this is that, while it may work satisfactorily for those persons living nearby or within commuting distance of the institution, such a pattern inevitably fails to provide for those students who, because of problems of access, mobility, or lack of time, are prevented from travelling to the campus; and Murdoch have had to deal with this issue.

(c) Swain has found that only 25% of the total number of students enrolled in external college courses in South Australia availed themselves of a new opportunity to enrol in programmes in person, in order to discuss their proposed course of study with academic staff and possibly resolve any potential or actual attendant difficulties. However, a special counselling team was established for 1977 and it is being restructured and enriched for 1978, so great has the value been to even the 25% who attended in the first year.

(d) The Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, Queensland, has established a series of regional counsellors with a 'hot-line' co-ordinator on campus. This counsellor rings around the various field workers to ensure they are in contact with students and likewise is answerable to them individually to guarantee that issues they have raised are resolved.

(e) In other programmes face-to-face counselling sessions are combined with or form part of short intensive live-in conferences or seminars, similar in fact to the periodic summer schools organized by the British Open University and described in some detail by McIntosh. Such a system has also been the practice for a quarter of a century at the University of New England in northern New South Wales. (See Crew and Smith, K.)

(ii) Another means by which face-to-face counselling can be implemented in distance education schemes is through an organizational structure which embraces a network of diverse decentralized agencies and resource centres deployed in prominent regional or provincial locations. This pattern is obviously more suited to circumstances where there are significant numbers of widely dispersed students living substantial distances from the campus, where problems of access cannot easily be overcome. This system has had to be used widely in Australia because of the vast distances involved for students, even though they are few in number. Danglade describes an interesting U.S. variation and resolution of the problem.

(a) In Australia, the new Deakin University has made provision for some rather intensive off-campus student counselling undertakings, which in some measure have gained their impetus from experiences at the Open University. Like the Open University, Deakin too incorporates a number of supplementary regional study centres where off-campus students have access to tutorial and advisory services; though, again, little attempt seems to have been made to distinguish clearly between counselling and instructional activities. These centres however do perform an important function in providing practical assistance to local residents seeking admission to off-campus studies at Deakin by putting them in contact with persons who are able to proffer further information about the correct procedures to follow. With its specific charter for external students, Deakin has produced as well a counselling package for potential students and has too a 'flying squad' for regional face-to-face visits. Interestingly enough, the participation of lecturers in the squad seems very minimal at this induction stage and one could question their lack of involvement. The Peterson article is relevant to this issue.

The details of the Deakin activities are as follows. Persons intending to study through Deakin are sent an impressive two-part "counselling package" which is designed to enable the potential student to determine for himself whether he feels capable of coping effectively with the exigencies of external study. The first part of the package contains some useful introductory material, indicates a few of the more common problems likely to be encountered by external students, outlines some of the resources available and people to contact, as well as providing information on study skills and techniques. In the second part the reader is given a number of self-assessment or self-selection exercises to complete, which are meant to allow intending students, especially those of mature age, to test their motivation and analyse their reasons for studying. Implicit in this procedure is the assumption that "the better a student understands what he is letting himself in for and surer he is that this is what he wants to do, then the more likely he is to be successful".

(b) The Open University system deserves special investigation; both because it is elaborate and also because it is coming under increasing criticism for what some writers and practitioners see as the abnegation of the importance of counselling. The British Open University originally established a system whereby a group of local tutors and counsellors operated within a comprehensive hierarchical structure consisting of major study centres, staffed by full-time on-site staff, augmented by minor study support centres, opening one or two evenings a week. This system also comprised a number of key "location" points where a local part-time counsellor acted as a co-ordinator and director of studies to all students in the surrounding area.

As a result of recent fiscal constraints and uncertainties, this structure has now been modified in such a way that the tutorial and counselling functions have been formally merged for students in courses at foundation level, while post-foundation courses are serviced by different counsellors. As Beevers points out, the university has defined two distinct though not necessarily separate functions for its local part-time staff, who are now required to act in a dual capacity as both tutor and counsellor - a development which has been viewed with trepidation by some observers who question the wisdom of abolishing the two categories of staff. As Stone and Shertzer indicated, both counsellor and teacher are educators. They are both involved in helping students learn. What is questioned is should the two types of learning be associated with the one 'teacher'. Cook, Holloway, Mitchell (1) and Nicholson, for example, see the blurring of role distinctions between educational assessor and advisor as being based on inherently unsound pedagogical principles. Nicholson, in particular, takes the view that by combining the counselling and teaching functions in foundation courses the opportunity for making the induction into the open mode of learning less eventful and dramatic for new students has been decidedly lost. Simpson offers comment from another perspective, that of the post-foundation counsellor.

In this area of discussion (i) 'campus' has become (ii) 'extended campus(es)' and in (iii), 'off campus'. (See Gough.)

(iii) Another method of conducting face-to-face counselling in external education programmes is by means of itinerant counsellors or educational guidance officers who travel to different regions to help local students sort out their study problems and overcome anxieties. This sytem has been employed extensively both in Australia and overseas and it seems particularly applicable to circumstances where staff and financial resources are limited. One major advantage of this system is that it is extremely flexible inasmuch as counselling personnel are able to make visitations whenever and wherever sufficient numbers of students demonstrate a need (or a student expresses a strong need) to have their problems dealt with in a face-to-face manner.

On the other hand, some programmes prefer a system whereby counsellors visit regions at regular intervals throughout the year. Periodic visits by counsellors are naturally publicized well in advance, students living in the vicinity either being contacted individually by mail or, as is more often the case, an announcement of the impending visit is made through the local media. (see Peterson.)

Such a system is not without its limitations however, e.g. pressing problems may have to be "stored" until such time as the counsellor is in the area. There is necessarily a limited amount of time that any one counsellor can remain in a particular locality hence very little scope exists for establishing close rapport or developing highly interactive long-term counselling relationships with students. Nevertheless there is great value in the counsellor knowing at first hand the student's social milieu.

In America, several non-traditional learning institutions have adopted quite complex pre-enrolment face-to-face counselling and advising programmes for independent students, e.g. the University Without Walls consortia. As a one-off illustration, the experience of Hunter College, CUNY, is worth noting. Hunter College recognises that enrolment is not just a mechanical action but rather a decision-making process that has long-term educational implications.

Hunter College, City Uni. of New York Consortium has established an Office of Academic Advising. Decker, Jody and Brings recount how, prior to registration, students are called in for appointments with a group of graduate students who are specifically hired and trained to help them with programme planning. Course counsellors and faculty advisors are also on hand to help with alternative educational strategies and to discuss aspects of the curriculum that students should consider before making their preliminary course choices. New students are invited to participate in special "conference days" at which representatives from each faculty and programme gather to answer questions about courses. In this way, students are presented with the opportunity for personal consultation to help them prepare for registration. When they finally come to register for courses, students are again given the chance to discuss the alternatives open to them and have their proposed programmes approved by academic advising teams. Group advising sessions are conducted in classrooms of thirty students, with a course counsellor assisted by five senior or graduate students, acting as "peer advisors", who explain registration format and aid students to determine their course schedules. Any subsequent change of programme has to obtain the approval of the Office of Academic Advising.

COUNSELLING SERVICES FOR ACADEMICS

There remains to be discussed one significant area of underdevelopment, viz, the counselling of academic staff. No significant documents on this topic were identified. If we accept that counselling is an interactive process, then we are back to a triad situation, namely: prima facie there is interaction between

student and lecturer; allied to this may develop interaction between student and counsellor. Then one would expect that, at least occasionally, there would develop counsellor-lecturer interaction because of either or both of the two prior interactions. Not infrequently there would be simultaneous three way interaction i.e. the three dyadic situations giving rise to the triad.

That nothing is researched in this area may be due to several issues and these are raised for your consideration and response.

(i) Is it that Moore's independent learner is still a distant figure on the horizon, whose approach has not yet been recognised by academics? This seems odd because the very concept, academic, implies that that person himself has almost certainly been an independent learner/researcher in his doctoral-type studies. Has he not then recognised the new breed of independent learner?

(ii) Is it, as Davison has noted, that the academic world has still not been able to grapple with the affective dimensions of learning sketched out by Bloom in his taxonomies?

(iii) Is it, as in the Open University experience, that the pure academics have been effectively insulated from student reaction by the interposition of course tutors and counsellors, so that their only exposure to student reaction occurs at the brief cognitively-oriented summer school?

(iv) Is it that the very development of course teams provides the opportunity for limited peer counselling of the academic? But must we not also ask why is it that counsellors per se do not feature prominently on course teams?

(v) Is it that the concept, counselling, is still overly associated with the notion of the abnormal, and therefore it is not seen as part of the normal interaction profile of all students. Does this also explain in part the reaction of administrative academics that any requests for resources are 'abnormal'?

(vi) Is it likely that since counselling is seen as a justifiable activity for the benefit of the disadvantaged, i.e. the distance learner, that in time it may be seen as a beneficial service to the disadvantaged academic, i.e. he who has the 'misfortune' to be teaching disadvantaged learners?

(vii) Is it possible that the counsellor may come more to the fore if we accept, as per Davison, that 'counselling is therefore essentially a concern for the true balance of objectives, with a meaningful integration in the educational scene and with a meaningful integration of communicable knowledge with the felt needs of the learners.....The counsellor's special existence rests on the claim that the balance has been distorted by traditional methods.' If the claim is correct and the balance is corrected, then someone needs to be around to assist, if necessary, with the newly-felt needs of the 'teachers' as well, as they pass through a learning experience of their own. But let us again shift the focus back to the distance student.

COUNSELLOR QUALITIES : IN BRIEF

For counselling to be effective in helping students to cope with problems, it must promote a sense of close rapport between the student and the counsellor. Thomas, Watkins, and Murgatroyd have suggested in their respective studies that counsellors should be able to identify and respond positively to individual student problems and requests for advice. The counsellor needs to demonstrate empathy in dealing with student enquiries, provide assistance and encouragement wherever necessary and, above all, as Hutchinson has emphasised, be sensitive to the needs, spoken or unspoken, of the student. It is worth noting that, with the exception of Hutchinson, all the above writers are reporting from the peculiar milieu of the Open University. As discussed earlier, this university has its own assumptions about the role of counsellors vis-a-vis tutors and its own matrix of student distribution which is not characteristic of much of the world-wide external studies activity.

Shoben, insists (and one might have hoped insistence was unnecessary) that the counselling process, although it should help to facilitate the student to reach a decision, must place ultimate responsibility for decision-making with the student. He states, contra Tyler, 'counselling is mainly (which is *not* a synonym for "wholly") neither a matter of solving problems nor of making decisions; rather it is a *developmental experience* in which attempts to solve problems and arrive at decisions are the events out of which through reflection and the process of "working through", personal growth takes place.' He believes that, for counselling to be effective, it (to quote Beamish) "requires an informed caring that refuses to lapse either into sticky dependence-creating behavior.....or into a practised indifference". In other words, the counsellor in his relations with the student should try to work himself out of, rather than into, a job, by promoting and encouraging student self-help. The student will become increasingly more confident about seeking and finding his own answers and solutions to problems and less dependent on the counsellor.

In the short-term it seems wise to note the comment by Northedge re Thomas' paper, viz, it is pointless producing extensive checklists of desirable counsellor skills, until we are clearer what is the nature of the total problem to be resolved. Of course, Thomas' response could well be that, inasmuch as his part of the problem is clear, there is ample justification for specifying counsellor qualities and skills needed to resolve it. At least, a list is helpful as one base.

CONCLUSIONS : A CHECK-LIST

1. Counselling services are still an under-rated activity where distance learners do not represent the major or sole interest of educational institutions.

2. Counselling needs to be removed from being permanently an over-load activity for administrators and academics and should be developed by specialist staff who will, no doubt, continue to relate to administrators and academics.

3. More explicit research is required into the needs of distance learners so that conclusions are not reached de facto from adult learners' or non-traditional learners' research.

4. Co-counselling needs to be practised more intensively and, in a complementary way, a matrix of referral services needs to be identified for each institution, covering funding bodies, administrative networks, academic resources, and social and medical facilities either intra- or extra-institutional.

5. Independent counselling services or cross-institutional referrals should come more into fashion so that counselling becomes student-centred and not institutional-recruitment-centred.

6. The training of specialist counsellors needs to be developed.

7. Much clarification of the range of counselling activities (i) within any one interview and (ii) over the student's academic life span is still needed.

8. The counselling needs of distance educators (maybe a special type of distance learner?) require investigation.

9. Those who are engaged in any way in counselling need to be encouraged to document their experience for the benefit of others. This study has made us aware that there must be a wealth of experiences from varying practices and we would all benefit from access to that experience.

Finally, what we all need to remember is that our practice and very existence is always potentially transient. As Davison concludes : 'What he (the counsellor) cannot claim is an existence that is fundamentally necessary, for his is a response to a changing and, therefore, disordered situation rather than an integral part of an ordered one.....This 'stop-gap' status is neither peculiar to counselling in education nor a menial one.'

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